



September 6, 2017

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

On behalf of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, YMCA of the USA, the American Camp Association, and the undersigned organizations serving millions of young people across the country, we urge you to support passage of the Child Protection Improvements Act (S. 705), which is scheduled for markup tomorrow before your committee.

Too often we read and watch heart-breaking news stories about young victims of child predators and the systems that failed to protect them. These stories are backed up by sobering facts:

- Every year, more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies across the country, involving more than 6.6 million young people.
- A referral of child abuse is made every 9 seconds and Child Protective Services responds to a report of sexual abuse every 9 minutes.
- 1 in 10 children in the United States will be sexually abused before they turn 18.

Youth-serving organizations have a responsibility to create safe, nurturing environments for the young people in their care. Our organizations know how critical a thorough and quality background screening is in order to safeguard the young people we support. This is why we stridently support the bipartisan, bicameral Child Protection Improvements Act (CPIA).

CPIA would create a national system providing access to FBI fingerprint background checks for screening potential volunteers and staff of organizations serving vulnerable populations, including children, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly.

Organizations providing services to youth must be able to effectively, affordably, and reliably screen their volunteers and employees to ensure they do not have an inappropriate criminal past that might endanger the young people they seek to help. FBI fingerprint background checks are the most complete and reliable means of checking an individual's criminal record, and are the only type of background check that is truly available on a nationwide basis. Unfortunately, the current background check system is not universally accessible to youth-serving organizations. Currently, all FBI requests must go through state agencies, but only one-third of states allow a wide range of youth-serving organizations to access this critical screening tool. Even in states where FBI searches are accessible, they can be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.

We know from the PROTECT Act Child Safety Pilot managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that FBI searches provide information that is absolutely critical for screening youth-serving volunteers and employees. Results from the pilot shows that over 6 percent of the more than 100,000 volunteers screened with FBI searches had criminal records of concern – including extremely serious crimes like child sexual abuse, cruelty to children, and even murder. In addition, more than 41 percent of individuals with criminal records of concern had crimes in states other than where they were applying to volunteer – meaning that only a nationwide check would have revealed these serious criminal offences.

CPIA would build on the lessons learned from the Child Safety Pilot and finally solve this problem for youth-serving organizations of all kinds and in all states. The bill creates a streamlined and efficient way for youth-serving organizations to access FBI fingerprint checks at a reasonable cost with optimized turnaround time.

We fully support S. 705 and the manager’s package that will be offered by CPIA sponsors Senators Hatch (UT) and Franken (MN). The amendment would:

- Remove the \$18 fee cap in the underlying bill, but retain the language guaranteeing the cost of these checks will not exceed the “actual cost” to the FBI to perform the check.
- Clarify that only nonprofit organizations would be eligible to pay less than the “actual cost” for their screenings. For-profit organizations can still utilize the program established by CPIA to perform fingerprint checks, and their costs may not exceed the actual cost to conduct the background check.

We urge you to support the Child Protection Improvements Act, S. 705. Thank you in advance for your efforts to help youth-serving organizations across the country keep young people safe.

Sincerely,

100 Black Men of America, Inc.

A World Fit For Kids!

Afterschool Alliance

After-School All-Stars

Amachi, Inc.

America SCORES

American Camp Association

Bender JCC of Greater Washington

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

College Mentors for Kids

Communities in Schools

Foundation for Jewish Camp

Friends of the Children

Girl Scouts of the USA

Girls Inc.

Institute for Educational Leadership

JCC Association of North America

Kaiserman Jewish Community Center

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership

Mentors, Inc.
National 4-H Council
National Disability Mentoring Coalition
National PTA
Sisters Circle
The First Tee
U.S. Dream Academy, Inc.
YMCA of the USA

CC: Senate Judiciary Committee